

“SIN UNTO DEATH”

1 John 5:16-17

Intro: These two verses are obviously related to that the Apostle John had written about prayer. (Read verses 14 and 15.) And, as we saw last week, these two verses, 14 and 15, are related to what John had to say about prayer in chapter 3 verses 21 and 22. (Read.) If we want to see our prayers answered, we must keep God’s commandments and we must pray according to His will. This is why I said last week that we can hardly be praying according to the will of God if we are not keeping the commandments of God in daily life. And we know, or should know, that the commandments of God are both positive and negative. That is, some tell us what God wants us to do; others tell us what God does not want us to do. So we can’t really pray according to God’s will unless we are living according to His will. The Apostle John had been with the other apostles which the Lord said to them as they walked from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane,

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you (John 15:7).

It can’t be emphasized too much that when you and I read our Bibles, we need to pay attention to the commandments of the Lord which apply to all of us as the people of God. There are, of course, commandments that were given by God to particular individuals, or to the nation Israel in some time of special need, which would not apply to us. When the Lord told Noah to build an ark, and gave him the specifications of it, those were instructions that applied to Noah, not to us. When the Lord told Jonah to go to Nineveh, that was a commandment for Jonah alone at that particular time. When our Lord told His disciples to go and prepare a room where He could observe the Passover with them, that was a command that involved just the disciples. I think you know what I mean. But when the Lord told Abraham in Genesis 17:1, “Walk before me, and be thou perfect,” that is how we are to walk also. So we have to be discerning as to whether or not the commands we find in Scripture are just for people at a certain time and under certain circumstances, or whether they apply to us faced with certain situations, or whether they are for the people of God at all times, such as you would find in the epistles of the NT.

Looking for commandments in Scripture that apply to all of us who are the Lord’s people, will keep us awake as we read our Bibles. They are

very, very important. They show us how the Lord wants us to live. They are commandments which, under the blessing of God, produce holy lives. The Lord said that He came to do the will of the Father which sent Him. That should be our objective every day that we live. Only there were many commandments that the Father gave to the Lord Jesus, that He has not give to us. But obedience to God's will is what we need to be concerned about every day with live. While the Lord was with His disciples in the Upper Room, He said this to His disciples, and they surely apply to us as well:

21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him (John 14:21).

This is what the Apostle John had in mind when he wrote 1 John 3:22. (Read.) Our obedience to the Lord's commandments needs to be a way of expressing our love for Him, so it must be joyful and consistent.

But our text for today also has to do with *sin*. The Apostle John combined prayer and sin the first time he mentioned sin in this epistle. We noticed that also last week when I was speaking about the time the Apostle mentioned prayer in this epistle. I am referring, of course, to 1 John 1:9:

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

"Unrighteousness" is another word for *sin*. Sin is anything that is a violation of God's Word. It is anything that is contrary to God Himself. The Lord Jesus died to save us from our sins. He died to save us from the penalty of our sins, which was death, eternal death, but He also died to save us from the power of sin. Before a person is saved, he or she is a slave of sin. At one time sin had dominion over all of us. But those who have received Christ have been set free from the bondage of sin. We can still sin, but we don't have to sin. If we do, we need to confess it to God, and the promise of 1 John 1:9 is that when we do, God forgives us and cleanses us by virtue of the blood of Christ. So several times in this epistle which we have been studying, the Apostle John has taught us that "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (as in 1 John 3:9). He did not mean that a Christian cannot sin, but he meant that a Christian will not live in sin. A person who lives in sin is not a Christian even though he may claim that he is.

So what I am saying is that through a prayer of confession to God when we sin, our fellowship with God is restored and our sin is forgiven, and

we are cleansed.

But sin and death go together. When the Lord spoke to Adam in the garden of Eden about what he could eat and what He was not to eat (and God had the right to put this limitation upon Adam), this is what God said to Adam. You find these words in Genesis 2:16 and 17:

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16-17).

We all know what followed, and we have been affected by what followed. The Devil tempted Eve, and she ate of the fruit. Then she gave the fruit to Adam, and he ate it. Did they die? They certainly did! They did not drop dead immediately, but they did eventually. But they did die right away spiritually, and this sentence of death was on them eternally. There are three kinds of death – physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20).

Now reading from our text in verse 16 the Apostle John was speaking of one of the evidences of salvation, and it was this. That if we are born again, we are going to love others who are born again. We will have a love in our hearts for all of the Lord’s people, for all who are members of the family of God. And one thing that ought to make us immediately and deeply concerned for a brother or sister in Christ, is when we see them involved in sin. Now here John was not talking about the loss of their salvation. But he was talking about the loss of their physical life. He did not mean that we die if we sin, but he was saying that there is such a thing as physical death being the punishment for sin. But notice those three little words in the middle of verse 16, “he shall ask.” Who shall ask? The Christian who sees a brother or sister in Christ who is sinning. To whom do they direct their request? Obviously, to God. All prayer is to be addressed to God in the Name of Christ. What does this brother ask as he prays for a sinning brother? He asks God to deliver the sinning brother. This does not mean that he cannot also talk to his brother, but the emphasis is upon his prayer, prayer that his brother will turn from his sin, and seek forgiveness and cleansing from God. But maybe he will just pray. There is great power exercised when we pray for each other, and especially when we pray for a sinning brother because there is such a thing as sin

unto death. The Bible gives us illustrations of sin unto death, but I don't know if the Bible tells us just exactly when a person has sinned to the point that the Lord ends his life.

Now at this point let me inject a verse from Solomon's book of Proverbs. It is a verse that most of you know. Many of you could quote it from memory. It is stated more than one time in the Bible. I am speaking about Proverbs 9:10. Listen as I read it to you.

10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding (Prov. 9:10).

"The fear of the Lord" is one of the most important subjects in all of the Bible. You will find it in the NT as well as in the OT. It is usually defined as meaning that we show reverence for the Lord. We worship Him in awe. He alone is God. He is the Creator, and we are His creatures. He is perfectly holy, and we are at the very best are only sinners saved by grace. I want to read to you Psalm 95 which, although it does not speak of "the fear of the Lord," yet it gives us a perfect definition of the fear of the Lord. It describes for us what it means to worship the Lord. And it carries with it a warning from Israel's history which tells us that one part of what it means to fear the Lord, is that we fear the consequences of disobeying the Lord. Psalm 95 reminds us of one of the greatest example of sin unto death that we have in the Bible.

(Read Psalm 95.)

The Apostle Paul was describing the most tragic characteristic of the human heart, and of the whole human race in every generation, and of our country today, when he wrote in Romans 3:18, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Going back to the book of Proverbs we find this statement about the fear of the Lord in Proverbs 8:13:

13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

If we truly fear God, we are going to stay as far away from sin as we can get.

I said earlier that the Scriptures do not give us an exact statement of how we can know when a person, or a nation, has sinned unto death. God's ways and our ways are completely different. For example, God did not kill David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then had her husband killed to cover his sin, but Moses did sin unto death when he

struck the rock after the Lord had told him just to speak to the rock. Cf. Numbers 20:1-12. So you can't say that it was because Moses was a leader of the Lord's people; David was a leader too.

Another example of sin unto death was the judgment of the flood in the days of Noah. The flood is described in Genesis 7:17-24.

Or take God's destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which is meant to be a warning to all who engage in homosexual behavior. That is in Genesis 19.

Before the Lord condemned the whole generation of Israelites to die in the desert before the next generation could go in to possess the land, the Lord counted "ten times" that the children of Israel had rebelled against Him. See Numbers 14:22.

Remember how Nadab and Abihu, the two older sons of Aaron, died when they offered strange fire before the Lord. See Numbers 3:4.

In 1 Chronicles 13 we read how the Lord killed Uzza as David and his men were bringing the ark of the covenant to the city of David because Uzza put out his hand to steady the ark and to keep it from falling off of the cart when the oxen stumbled.

Going into the NT we read in Acts 5, verses 1 through 11, of how Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied about their offering which they brought to the Lord.

In Acts 12:21-25 we read about Herod who gave a speech on a certain day, and the people said it was the voice of a god, and not of a man. The Lord struck Herod, and he was eaten by worms because he did not give God the glory.

A still more solemn instance of sin unto death is given to us in 1 Corinthians 11 where the people had been eating and drinking at the Lord's table in an unworthy manner. Notice Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:27-31:

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread,

and drink of that cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

Concl: As we study all of these instances of sin unto death in Scripture, I don't see any pattern than would help us to define a sin unto death. Obviously there was no particular sin which is singled out above the others. One factor seems to be that it was when sin was persisted in, but the sin of Moses was certainly an exception to that. But sins not unto death were to be prayed for. That is clear. John would not say that sins unto death were to be prayed for. The clearest hint that we have about sin unto death is given in verse 17 where you can see that the Apostle John said, "All unrighteousness is sin." So the best way to be safe is to stay completely away from all sin, regardless of what it is. Instead of compromising with sin, we need to run away from sin in any form, and pursue holiness by keeping the commandments of the Lord. These are days when God's standards of right and wrong are being abandoned on a major scale. Even professing Christians are approving those who live together as husband and wife with marriage. Our sin will find us out. Let us be determined that by the grace of God we will keep ourselves upspotted by the world. God's way of holiness is the only way to true happiness.